

# The GAME of

# COLLEGE

Even if you aren't graduating this year, prepare yourself for the road ahead **By Landon Hudson**



Graphics by Elizabeth Tibbe

It's 3:30 p.m. when junior Allison Matz comes home, tired from the seven hour day of school and aware that she still has two to four hours worth of AP homework left in her backpack. And that's on a day where she isn't scheduled at her after-school job or volunteering with the InterAct club.

But it doesn't bother her. She knows it's her choice to take the harder classes and stay busy. She expects the rigorous additional work. Matz is determined that it will all pay off throughout the next couple of years. She envisions attending med school and needs all the shortcuts she can take since she knows her process will be a long one.

"The career I want requires lots of schooling, so I can get some classes out of the way and then get into the actual classes I need," Matz said. "I'm looking into colleges now that it's my junior year and I'm maintaining well-roundedness and good grades."

But Matz' plan isn't for everyone. And that's okay.

## The next step

The idea of college might be foreign territory to some, but to others it may seem like the natural next step.

Kim McLaughlin, Director of the Tri-Cities College Access Network (TCAN) recommends that some post-secondary education is better than none.

According to TCAN, 65 percent of jobs by 2025 will require

additional schooling. However there are many different paths students can choose to take.

"In today's global economy, education after high school is critical," McLaughlin said. "But that can look many ways – that could mean attending a trade school, doing an apprenticeship, earning a 2 or 4-year degree, or pursuing the military."

## Hands-on

One option students have is to take career-focused classes through the Careerline Tech Center (CTC) in Holland. There

they can earn college credit, apply for scholarships and gain real-world experience.

"Tech Center works with our students to help them find what they are passionate about and add real-world relevance to that learning," Director of CTC Dave Searles said.

Students also have the opportunity to receive certification in most of the offered career paths. They can be certified in Phlebotomy (blood draws), Medical Assisting, EMT-Basic (Health), CompTIA and CIW (IT), State of Michigan Mechanics (Auto Mech/Diesel) and many more.

CTC is a half-day program, giving students the ability

to continue participating in their school's sports, clubs and classes. In addition, they can receive credit for math and english courses.

During school, students can participate in job shadows, co-op, unpaid work experiences, and internships with CTC's business and industry partners. Many of those work based learning opportunities become part or full time jobs after high school, while students pursue college.

Searles emphasizes how important it is to continue learning after graduation.

"To put it bluntly, the more you learn, the more you earn," Searles said. "Education after high

-junior Allison Matz

school is required for many jobs these days, and CTC can help get you on the right track to qualify for those jobs while still in high school."

In 2013, the National Center for Education Statistics found average earnings for those with a bachelor's degree were \$48,500 and those who received an associate's degree earned about \$37,500 while workers with a high school diploma made an average of \$30,000 a year.

## Head start

There's a lot to consider when thinking about the future, but senior Sydney Fritz recommends the Early College program for junior and senior students to get a feel for higher level education. They are able to take college classes at Muskegon Community College while in high school.

"I wanted to do early college because it was a great opportunity for me to get a head start," Fritz said. "It's a great program because it allows me to slowly work my way into college by taking only a few classes with my high school classes."

Fritz, as well as the other Early College students, will come out of the program with an associate's degree and up to 63 free credits.

"I also like the freedom to choose classes that appeal to me rather than being told what I should take," Fritz said.

## Military

Another option students can consider after graduation is to join the armed forces.

2015 GHHS alumni Drew Danskine joined the Marine Corps after graduation.

"I've always wanted to join since I was little because the military runs in my family," Danskine said.

He met with a recruiter to set up a meeting in Lansing where he was medically examined, enlisted and sworn in on the same

day.

The military is a financially conscious option as Danskine's schooling is paid for as are his health and dental coverage. But there are moral rewards for him as well.

"It betters you as a person all around to become something greater than yourself," Danskine said. "The benefits from joining are so amazing you can't pass it up."

## Money isn't everything

Although the financial aspect of attending post-secondary school has proven to be a barrier for some students, personal finance and math teacher Chad Williams assures that there are scholarships and additional help available.

"You can seek scholarships or you can go to community college and then jump to a four-year college," Williams said. "You have to look at your interests too, if college isn't your thing, there are trade schools where you can get certified in certain things. You want to weigh in cost versus reward. In general you've also got to fill out those forms to see what it will really cost you."

McLaughlin recommends that every post-secondary seeking student should fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form. A variety of factors other than income are considered, including the size of your family to the age of your older parent. Eligibility is determined by a mathematical formula, not necessarily your parent's financial income. In addi-

tion, filling out a FAFSA automatically applies you for potential funding from the school and state. Some schools require a FAFSA when considering you for other scholarship opportunities including academic ones.

"Don't make assumptions about what you'll get, fill out the application and find out," McLaughlin said.

TCAN is designed to help students prepare for college early on and create a college-bound community. Their college advisor, Jana Reenders, is in student services on Tuesdays to answer any questions involving post-graduation plans.

## Plan ahead

Even if thinking about the next step is in the back of your mind right now, Matz suggests from personal experience to stay focused on school and getting involved in extracurriculars.

"Work harder than you are already do, you can do a lot more than you think you can do," Matz said. "You're always smarter than you think you are, so if you work harder, you can do it."

McLaughlin agrees and says that colleges look to see that you have worked hard and have shown improvement throughout school.

"I would say that students need to be working hard no matter what year of high school they are in," McLaughlin said. "They need to be exploring their career interests and learning what they like and dislike and talking with their counselors to make sure they are on-track."